



Safety Up – On Training New Workers

So you've hired extra help. Good news! You probably want to get them out into the field as quickly as possible. Question is: How will you train them? All new employees need proper job orientation and training before they get to work.

Maybe you've hired someone with farm experience; then again, maybe not. Statistics suggest that youth aged 15 to 29 make up a significant portion of seasonal farm workers – and many will be learning about agriculture for the first time. Whatever their background is, they are your staff now. It's up to you to provide them with the essential training to ensure their safety on the job.

Three steps to safe farming

Know the job. Know the hazard. Know the drill. As a farm manager and staff supervisor, it's up to you to ensure that everyone working for you has the knowledge and skills to prevent injuries and fatalities on the job.

One easy way to keep farm safety top of mind is to think of it as a three-step process that starts when you **know the job**. Knowing the job means getting properly trained ahead of time for each new task you perform. The second step involves recognizing hazards. When you have the skills to perform the job, you need to **know the hazards** you could face and be continually alert for them throughout your workday. The third step is learning how to handle hazards once you recognize them. Sometimes your objective is to manage unavoidable hazards. Other times you can simply avoid them altogether. In either case, to handle hazardous situations appropriately, you have to **know the drill**.

Training – who needs it?

In days gone by, the farm family did most of the work. But farms have gotten larger, and more inexperienced labour is being hired. Add to that the increased complexity and technological advancements in farm machinery and production processes, and it's easy to spot the need for new worker training. Hundreds of new employees end up injured on the job, resulting in lost time. Most of these injuries happen because of a lack of knowledge. You can help! Never assume a staff member knows what is expected of them – give them the training up front. It will pay off in the end.

As a new worker, it is frustrating and scary to be sent out to do a job without instructions or training. Even if you feel like you're repeating yourself or being redundant, always take the time to go through the training exercise first. Does your staff really **know the job**? Here are some tips to help you train new workers effectively:

- Explain techniques that will make a task easier.
- Provide comprehensive training for complex tasks such as equipment operation.
- Specify dos and don'ts of safe machine operation.
- Ensure appropriate warning decals are in place and read by all workers.
- Once training is complete, monitor job performance to ensure your workers fully understand the job and are following all safety precautions.
- Provide information about equipment maintenance requirements.

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Set the tone, set an example

Farm workers do many different tasks in a day. Help them take time to get to **know the hazards** of each job before they start. As a farm manager, you can shape your new staff's attitude toward safety by setting an example. When you are responsible, accountable, and ultimately prepared to accept liability for their safety and your own, you teach them a level of personal responsibility they – and you – can be proud of.

To help new workers learn to recognize hazards:

- Tell them up front about specific hazards and how to avoid them – such as the hazards of working with livestock, tractors, farm implements, and other equipment.
- Include safety information in: the job description, hiring process, orientation and training, performance reviews, compensation and disciplinary actions.
- Explain risks of exposure to dust, noise, chemicals and toxic materials, and how to prevent related incidents or injuries.
- Ensure all employees wear suitable clothing for the environment.
- Maintain adequate supplies of appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE).
- Lead by example. Use safe practices in your work to demonstrate how you expect staff to behave.
- Show staff through your own work style that short-cuts on safety are unacceptable.
- Keep safety top of mind by talking about it on an ongoing basis.

What's the drill?

Once you've trained your workers to run the equipment and also to recognize hazards on the go, the final step is ensuring they can apply their knowledge to prevent incidents, avoid injuries, and ensure everything runs smoothly. When they **know the drill**, you can be confident that they know how to manage or avoid the hazards of farm work.

Here are a few ideas you and your staff can use to manage hazards:

- Discuss various farm hazards that come up in your work and what can be done to avoid or manage them – and then do it.
- Prevent back injuries by ensuring new employees understand correct lifting techniques, and keep an eye on staff on the job to ensure they are lifting properly.

- Encourage workers to report unsafe conditions and equipment. Their timely action can save you money and reduce the potential for injuries.
- Provide direction ahead of time about how to handle an emergency situation.
- Ensure all workers and family members know how to contact emergency services.
- Ensure at least some staff and family members have first-aid training.
- Teach employees how to use fire extinguishers. In the hands of a trained employee, a small fire extinguisher could be the difference between a minor brush fire and the loss of your livelihood.

Who's in Charge?

Imagine an inexperienced, untrained worker running the assembly line while your tractor was being built... yikes! Do you actually think it's safer to put one in the driver's seat?

The last word

Well-trained workers experience less frustration, greater morale, higher productivity and benefit from a safer workplace. When you do your part – by providing them with the training and experience to gain confidence on the job – then your new workers will soon be ready to take personal responsibility for ensuring their own safety on the job.

References

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